

Oral History Program
California State University, Sacramento, California

Oral History Interview

with

MASATOSHI ABE

April 29, 1989

By Mary Tsukamoto
Japanese American Oral History Project



JAPANESE AMERICAN CITIZENS LEAGUE

FLORIN CHAPTER • PO Box • SACRAMENTO, CALIFORNIA 95829-2634

PREFACE

In the summer of 1987, a small group of people from the Florin JACL met at Mary and Al Tsukamoto's home to plan a new project for the organization. Because of the unique history of Florin, we felt that there were special stories that needed to be preserved. The town of Florin, California was once a thriving farming community with a large Japanese American population. The World War II internment of persons of Japanese ancestry living on the west coast, devastated the town and it never recovered. Today there is no town of Florin; it has been merged into the larger county of Sacramento. Many Japanese Americans who reside throughout the United States, however, have their origins from Florin, or have relatives and friends who once had ties to this community. The town may no longer exist, but the spirit of the community continues to survive in people's hearts and memories.

Several hours have been devoted to interviewing former Florin residents. The focus of the interviews was on the forced internment and life in the relocation camps, but our questions touched on other issues. We asked about their immigration to the United States from Japan, pre-war experiences, resettlement after the war and personal philosophies. We also wanted to record the stories of the people left behind. They were friends and neighbors who watched in anguish as the trains transported the community away.

We have conducted these interviews with feelings of urgency. If we are to come away with lessons from this historic tragedy, we must listen to and become acquainted with the people who were there. Many of these historians are in their 70's, 80's and 90's. We are grateful that they were willing to share their experiences and to answer our questions with openness and thoughtfulness.

We owe special thanks to James F. Carlson, former Assistant Dean of American River College and to Jackie Reinier, former Director of the Oral History Program at California State University in Sacramento. Without their enthusiasm, encouragement and expertise, we never could have produced this collection of oral histories. We also wish to acknowledge the project members, volunteers, the Florin JACL which contributed financial support, Sumitomo Bank for their corporate donation, and the Taisho Young Mens Association which contributed some of their assets as they dissolved their corporation on December 31, 1991.

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INTERVIEW HISTORY

Interviewer

Mary T. Tsukamoto, Historian and Redress Activist,
Florin Japanese American Citizens League; Author of We
the People.

Interview Time and Place

April 4, 1988
Home of Mary Tsukamoto, 9816 Florin Perkins Road,
Sacramento, California.

Transcribing and Translating

The interview was conducted in Japanese. Preparing the
Japanese transcript and translating the interview into
English was supervised by Dr. Ben Kobashigawa, Professor
of Ethnic Studies at San Francisco State University.
This interview is unique because of the availability of
the material in both languages.

Photography

Pictures were reproduced by Dan Inouye, member of Florin
Japanese American Citizens League.

Editing

Mr. Abe's son, James Abe, reviewed the tape and returned
it with his approval in the Spring of 1992.

Tapes and Interview Records

Copies of bound transcript and the tapes will be held
by the Florin Japanese American Citizens League and in
the University Archives at The Library, California State
University, Sacramento, 6000 J Street, Sacramento,
California, 95819.

BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY

Masatoshi Abe was born in Oita Ken, Japan on January 7, 1896 to Shotaro, a farmer, who was thirty-one years of age, and to his wife, Hisa (Uchinomiya) Abe. A few years later another son was born to this farming couple, but times were hard. Shotaro heard stories from villagers who reported that those who went to America found plenty of jobs and were earning a lot of money!

So it was that early in the 1900s, Shotaro left his wife and children and sailed for America, hopeful and filled with dreams. Masatoshi and his little brother attended school. As they grew older, more and more they knew they must help their mother hard at work on their little farm. One day his mother became very ill.

Masatoshi as the eldest needed to quit school so he could help work the horse and care for the rice crop. Not too long after this, his mother died. His uncle came to help him run the farm. Masatoshi worked hard to help.

When Masatoshi was nearly eighteen, his father wrote a letter urging his two sons to come to America. He tells of this venture and the excitement they felt as they sailed to Seattle, Washington. How good it was to see his father he had not seen for so many years. He fondly remembers the shopping trip and buying shoes and American clothes.

Masatoshi was old enough now to work as an adult. His brother was too young. They could not hire him to work in the mines. His father decided it was best for him to attend school. They found him a home in Salt Lake City where he was to work for his room and board by helping in the kitchen and cleaning house.

A few years later Masatoshi speaks with deep sorrow of the tragic accident when his young brother was run over by a train and died. Somewhere in Utah there was a grave. Years later, years after he was old, he gratefully spoke of the trip when his son James took him to search for the cemetery and they found the grave.

When Masatoshi was twenty-two years of age, he and his father were working in Courtland, when it was decided he should marry. They remembered a fine woman named Shige

Morisuye. Masatoshi grew up with her in his village and knew her. She had been born on September 1, 1892 in Oita Ken. They sent for her and they were married in Courtland in 1922.

Masatoshi worked hard on the farms in the Delta area. Eventually he came to work in Florin for Mr. Davis who had a farm on the corner of Fruitridge and Power Inn Road. He was valued as a hard, honest worker. He learned to be a skilled farmer with the tractor.

June 21, 1923 James Abe was born. The family eventually settled on a farm on Elder Creek Road, east of Tokay Lane, where he became a successful strawberry grower and owner of a fine tokay grape vineyard.

By May 1942 World War II had ignited the anger, prejudice and war hysteria into an unbelievable tragedy in America. 120,000 persons of Japanese ancestry were ousted from their homes, jobs, and community into ten internment centers located inland. Without charge, innocent of any crime, their constitutional rights were denied. Thus Masatoshi Abe and his family left berries rotting in the fields, and along with 1,200 of his farming neighbors in Florin, ended up in Fresno Assembly Center, then Jerome, Arkansas, and later, Rower, Arkansas, for the duration of the war. The Abes tried resettling in southern California but later came back to their farm on Elder Creek Road where they farmed until 1989.

It was while Masatoshi was interned that he found a job in the carpenter shop. He had access to tools and scrap lumber. It was then he learned that he had a special skill to create beautiful things with wood. In his barracks room he built lovely chests, bureaus, cabinets, and inlaid work that have become museum pieces, now on display at the Sacramento History Center. This exhibit marks the fiftieth commemoration since internment. The Japanese American communities in the valley and the Sacramento History Center sponsored the "Continuing Traditions: Hundred Years History of a People" exhibit to be held until September 5, 1992.

Masatoshi Abe was a respected and staunch supporter of the Buddhist Church, the Kumamoto Kenjin Kai Board Member and the Taisho Kai Board. He was also a very strong supporter of the Kendo Program.

He was the very last Issei to grow tokay grapes in Florin in 1989. He was indeed the very last person in Florin after more than one hundred years after James Rutter had first introduced the flame tokay grapes in Florin.

Masatoshi Abe was one of the five Isseis honored by the United States Department of Justice and Bob Bratt on October 11, 1990 at the Sacramento Japanese Methodist Church where the official national apology and the check was personally handed to them. His life came to an end on July 14, 1991.

[Begin Tape 1, Side A]

TSUKAMOTO: I'm going to tape the oral history of Masatoshi Abe today which is November. . . . This is April 21, 1989 and we are checking to see how the tapes of the issei oral history turns out.

ABE: Ninety. In January--January 7--in two months, I'll be a year older [laughter].

TSUKAMOTO: January 7. You turned ninety two.

ABE: Ninety two. Pretty soon I should say, "Ninety three." While we talk, I'll be ninety three [laughter].

TSUKAMOTO: Soon, in 1979, you will be ninety two. Ninety three.

ABE: No. Soon I will be ninety three.

TSUKAMOTO: Three. Oh, that's 1989. Okay [laughter]. Well, you're in very good health. Excuse me. So, Abe-san, it's a long time ago, but do you remember anything about Japan, when you were little?

ABE: Well, to speak about Japan, there's hardly

anything. But anyway, well, before I left, mama died, grandpa died. Within about two years! Well. They were farmers.

TSUKAMOTO: How old were you?

ABE: When I came here, I was eighteen. When I was in Japan, I was about fifteen or sixteen still. Grandpa died. Mama died. Some kind of fever. So, someone in the community--someone who had no horse or equipment--and since I had a horse, I had loaned it to him. And he came to help. Farming, I did for about two years.

TSUKAMOTO: So you did it! And you were alone.

ABE: Yeah, alone!

TSUKAMOTO: And your father had already gone to America?

ABE: My father? Father, he was at a Utah copper mine. Really. So, that's why he came, I think. I was about ten then, I think.

TSUKAMOTO: You were ten. And, at about the age of five, you became separated from your father, and you did farming with your mother.

ABE: I did. I. . . . about my mother, farming. . .

TSUKAMOTO: What? You did farming? What did you grow?

ABE: Well, we grew rice seedlings. Rice seedings and rice.

TSUKAMOTO: Rice, yes?

ABE: Along with 'lunch' [meaning: growing rice]-- what was it?--we also made a little bit of kaya [miscanthus reed mat], called shitto [in Oita dialect?]-what you use over the tatami [grass floor matting]. Since Japanese farmers were generally set in what they did, that kind of thing. . . . if you had a field, you grew potatoes and things like that, right? That's why, after mama died, I was alone. Well, I had a brother, but he was a younger brother. Still only ten. He was sixteen when he came here.

TSUKAMOTO: You were the eldest?

ABE: My eldest sister [was] someplace else already .
. . .

TSUKAMOTO: You were the eldest?

ABE: My eldest sister was already someplace else.

TSUKAMOTO: Oh. You also had an older sister.

ABE: I had an older sister, but she was married early. That time, mama, although we were farming, I was still child, so I couldn't help. So, I started a little sake booth--just a place by the road you could have a little drink, a one-cup drinking place. I did that in Japan,

too, but I quit when my older sister and her husband joined the ie [household]. Then, after that we(?) left Japan and went to (South)[?] ^{Ut!} America. I don't seem to remember much about it. Anyway, you know, it's because it's seventy some years since I left Japan.

TSUKAMOTO: So, what do you remember most about when you came to America? The time when you arrived.

ABE: What do I remember when I first came? I didn't know English. Words [in English]. Well, I landed in Tacoma. In Tacoma, there was a hotel, a boarding[house] called the Hiroshimaya, so I went there to stay. People at the boarding[house] did everything for me. But changing cars and things like that on the way to Utah. . . . An interesting thing [on the way] since I didn't understand any words: On the train it said it cost twenty five cents to buy one orange. Ha! So, saying, "Twenty five cents!" me and my younger brother . . .

TSUKAMOTO: Twenty five cents!

ABE: "Twenty five" was written there--that was twenty five cents--so my brother and I said, "Let's see if we can buy some and eat."

Although we had enough money, twenty five cents, if it turned out to be different, we wouldn't be able to buy anything since we didn't understand what people said. So, the way I paid for something was to pay more, and then I would get the change. Here, if you put out more money, no matter what you buy, you get change. So, it's clear that way. So, that's the way it was when I first came, and not understanding the language was the biggest obstacle.

TSUKAMOTO: How did you feel when you went to Utah? When you met your father, you hadn't seen him in a long time, five years, seven years. Eight years.

ABE: It wasn't so long. I hadn't seen him in about ten years.

TSUKAMOTO: But do you still remember what happened back then?

ABE: Well, that's why, because sometimes he sent photographs and things, I got a general idea. [I went] to Ogden--Idaho, was it? . . . from Tacoma I came to Portland; after that, I went to Idaho; then, from Idaho to Ogden in Utah.

Then, since my father came to meet me in Ogden, Utah--among Japanese, whoever it is, just because it's someone's father [will say]: "Ah. That's papa!" It's because the face looks similar, right? He, father, also, because he knew that the two of us were coming, when he stepped off the train onto the platform, said, "Ha! Masatoshi!" as he came out. Well, that was the first time anything like that happened. In America. So, after coming to America and all that and meeting my father, he took me to the Utah copper mine; after that, I left everything up to him. Then, since I couldn't speak English, I went to Utah copper mine where there were about four hundred Japanese. [Yoshio and Giichi?] Gotan were there, too. As well as [] Hori-san.

TSUKAMOTO: Oh. Hori-san, too?

ABE: Everybody was in Utah, in the copper mine.

TSUKAMOTO: Where was everybody from, in Japan? Hiroshima?

ABE: No. Oita-ken [prefecture].

TSUKAMOTO: They were from Oita-ken, your [family]?. But Gotan and Hori-san were not, were they? They came from all over to Utah, right?

ABE: Yeah. Each one [from a different place]. When I came to the Utah copper mine, Hori-san was already there, and so was Gotan's papa and others in his family--the son, the younger brother [Giichi] came first. Later. . . . the younger brother came before the older brother [Yoshio]. He came a year before me.

TSUKAMOTO: That made it easier, didn't it? That your fathers came ahead of you. Your father coming ahead, and Gotan-san's father, too.

ABE: Yeah. They were first. In my papa's case, you know, Oita-ken, still had lots of land, so people couldn't go out from there. But they could go to Kōbe in Hyōgo-ken . . .

[Interruption]

TSUKAMOTO: . . . Now, what we were talking about was going from Oita-ken to Kōbe.

ABE: To work, sojourn. It means changing your residence to Kōbe. People couldn't leave from Oita-ken because there was still lots of farming land, but it was okay for people leave from Kōbe. That was because there were still lots of places to farm. In our case, papa had come here and called us over.

TSUKAMOTO: Called you over. Okay. He's talking about his early years in Japan, and his father was in Utah working in the copper mine, and he comes with his his brother, younger brother. His mother died, and they were farming in Japan, but his father is in America, so he comes at eighteen years. He did not know any English, and he had a hard time. Now, he comes and joins his father. Four hundred people-- Japanese--are also working.

ABE: Yeah, Four hundred people.

TSUKAMOTO: Oh, yeah. All working in the copper mine.

ABE: And you didn't need a bit of English. Because there were only Japanese. Even after coming to California, there were only Japanese.

TSUKAMOTO: You came [here] together?

ABE: Together. We--after we came separately to California, we still didn't use English. We used Japanese. Now, the nisei, after they got rich, thought not knowing English was bad and thought differently.

TSUKAMOTO: So that's why the fact that you, at ninety two, for how many decades, did not know English, your No. 1 [son] . . .

ABE: Yeah, No. 1 gets mad, always. Even my wife, at home, when James and the grandchild comes, it's all English. I can't use Japanese. They shouldn't be so unfeeling about it. But it can't be helped. I'm old now, and my time to die will come.

TSUKAMOTO: Hm. Well, while you regret not knowing, not learning English, what is the best thing about coming to America? What you think was good. What might that be?

ABE: I'm a little deaf, so. . . .

TSUKAMOTO: After coming to America, what you thought was good. What was good about coming to America?

ABE: Well, what were the good things? Hmm. What were the good things? I'd say there were only bad things I had no liking for. When I came to the Utah copper [mine], my younger brother, he was too young. And there was the First World War. 1915

TSUKAMOTO: 1915? Oh.

ABE: January. On January 8, we landed in Tacoma. January 8. The day after my birthday. That's why I remember when I landed, January 8. Then, I went to the Utah copper mine, but after I was

able to meet my father--let's see--that was the happiest time. And then in the [mining] camp, there were four hundred people. After that, everyone was working. All of us, including my father--after the First World War [started], those who weren't working couldn't stay in the camp. So, my younger brother left for Salt Lake town. There was an elementary school in the University of Utah, and he went to school there. He went--came--to the school a year and a half, almost two years. My younger brother, who came in '15--January '15--and was run over by a train in August '17--ah, that was the hardest thing in my mind. But before that, my father was at the Utah copper mine and a rock came flying out because of the powder [dynamite]--boom-boom-boom-boom. He was working outside, a rock came like this and made a big hole here. Well, since he survived, we came here. Were able to come. If he had died then, we couldn't have come to America. You had to be called over. Everybody. That was terrible.

TSUKAMOTO: So, your father was all right although he had a

hole? He got well?

ABE: He got better, but the bone was no good. If you pushed like this, the your finger went right in. It healed, but after he came here, he had a brain disease and finally died in California.

TSUKAMOTO: So, he was sick for a long time?

ABE: Father? I wouldn't say sick, but something like that. It was a year. About one year with the brain condition.

TSUKAMOTO: So, your father died in Utah?

ABE: He died here.

TSUKAMOTO: He came back here, to California, then?

ABE: Ah. There, the kid--I lost my brother, only. So, I worked for four years at the Utah copper mine. Then, because I wanted to go back to visit Japan, I came out to California. I was there four years, working there, and came to Sacramento in 1919. I didn't need any English here either. Even when I came to Sacramento, this Japanese person said, "Come work". He was going around talking fast in Japanese to everyone trying to hire somebody. Though I couldn't remember a bit of English, I could get

along. Only now--nowadays I think that was bad. My younger brother, his grammar improved a lot in one year. So, he would have remembered his English, but he died. He worked during the vacations.

TSUKAMOTO: What was your younger brother's name?

ABE: Hiroshi.

TSUKAMOTO: Hiroshi. Okay. Hiroshi graduated from grammar school, eighth grade?

ABE: Yeah. I think he must be lonely, too. He's in a cemetery in Salt Lake City, Utah, and then I came out here with father. Since father also said he wanted to go back to visit Japan, he came out here. Because a Japanese person hired him, saying, "Come work at my place this year."

TSUKAMOTO: What kind of work was that, that time?

ABE: Oh. Here, in California, it was growing seed. For Japanese people, mainly, in the [Sacramento River] Delta.

TSUKAMOTO: The Delta in Walnut Grove?

ABE: Merritt Island in Courtland. It's close to Sacramento. Since it's only about twenty miles, towards Courtland. I worked there, and then sent my father to Japan around October.

TSUKAMOTO: He came back, your father?

ABE: Then he came in March at the beginning of the year.

TSUKAMOTO: Returning?

ABE: He came here and died.

TSUKAMOTO: He was already ill, that time?

ABE: It wasn't an illness since his skull was split.

TSUKAMOTO: His return to America was in order to work some more?

ABE: Yeah. That's right. Since we were working-- after all, generally, we had the idea in our minds of coming to America to come make money, so we weren't lazy. When we worked, the attitude of working with all our might was always the Japanese feeling.

TSUKAMOTO: That's right, isn't it? Everybody sent money back to Japan, didn't they? Worked hard. Everybody made money and sent it to Japan.

ABE: No. We weren't that much money then. In those days--money nowadays everybody makes enough to throw it away. In those days, we didn't make so much money. Working ten hours, you got about three yen or three yen fifty sen.

TSUKAMOTO: For one day?

ABE: That's right. For ten hours.

TSUKAMOTO: Oh, my goodness!

ABE: Because that was all there was in those days. And since American money was only double [in terms of exchange rate], the money here, in Japan at that time, around the time the [inaudible] war started, if I sent 10,000 yen in Japanese money to Japan through Sumitomo [Bank], then in Japan they did whatever they do. The war started, and if you did it after, then Japanese money--10,000 yen was thirty some odd yen.

TSUKAMOTO: Oh. That was in 1941? At that time, "ichimannen" was ten thousand?

ABE: 10,000 yen. They worked it out after you sent it to Japan. If you did it yourself here, it wasn't so good.

TSUKAMOTO: Thirty . . .

ABE: Thirty something yen. When I visited Japan, in 1963, then a dollar here was 365 yen in Japan. One dollar was 365 yen.

TSUKAMOTO: That's pretty good, isn't it?

ABE: So, most people in Japan don't give gifts, what you call "miyage" [souvenirs], just money.

10,000 yen. 10,000 yen. They give money. But if 10,000 yen is only 30 some odd yen, then it makes sense. That's why, for "miyage" . . .

TSUKAMOTO: That's right. I guess everybody is happy.

ABE: At that time, if you turned a thousand dollars into Japanese money, that would make a lot. My wife and I [went] in 1963.

TSUKAMOTO: That was nice. Going together. You had never spoken with your mama [= wife] when you got married?

ABE: Yes, in Japan.

TSUKAMOTO: Oh. Before you came?

ABE: Yeah. Before I came, just between her and I, I promised [to marry her].

TSUKAMOTO: But you came alone. So, you called her over later? That is, after you came to Florin?

ABE: No. I was still in the Delta. I went to Florin right after that.

TSUKAMOTO: Oh. It was when you were in the Delta.

ABE: She was a good friend of my elder sister.

TSUKAMOTO: Your elder sister's?

ABE: And she often came to the house to play. When I was in Japan. That's why I made that promise.

TSUKAMOTO: So, the engagement was made before you went to America?

ABE: Yeah. The engagement.

TSUKAMOTO: What was her name?

ABE: Shige [Kiyohara].

TSUKAMOTO: Shige. What was her surname?

ABE: Then? Kiyohara.

TSUKAMOTO: Kiyohara. Shige Kiyohara. See, it would be good for your grandchildren and greatgrandchildren to know. Their grandma's family name and things like that [laughter]. So when, after you made the promise to her in Japan before you came in 1915 and then working in Walnut Grove after 1919. . . . then you called her over while you were working in Walnut Grove? See! He got his wife to come in 1919. Okay. And you went to Japan together. That was nice, wasn't it? In 1963. Did you have fun? When you went to meet your relatives in Japan in 1963, what was your biggest impression?

ABE: Well, my wife had lots of brothers and sisters, etc. but there was hardly anyone on my side. Mama was dead and so was grandpa. Mama had an

older sister, and her children were there. Too much! Somebody said they wanted to go and I heard [inaudible]'s mothers were going, so I talked to them. Right after that, there was somebody named Kawai Taiyo in San Francisco who takes tourists around [in Japan].

TSUKAMOTO: When you came on the boat, how many weeks did it take? Okay, so when you were working-- farming here, what's the main thing you would like to say about that time? Here. What were things like when you were growing strawberries and grapes? During the Depression. How did you manage?

ABE: Depression time. Well, I was working then. Here and there.

TSUKAMOTO: You didn't have a farm yet then?

ABE: No, no. The farm was after '57. In my name-- because I was an alien. . . .

TSUKAMOTO: You couldn't buy a farm, right.

ABE: Right, I couldn't. Although I changed it to James' name after the war when I came back, but up until then [it was in the name of] a corporation, the Ichigo Kumiai [Strawberry Farmers Cooperative].

TSUKAMOTO: That was a Japanese corporation?

ABE: Yeah, Japanese corporation.

TSUKAMOTO: Meaning they made a company, right? Japanese corporation. Therefore, you were working on the John Davis farm under the corporation?

ABE: Under the corporation. Ah! After I quit [working at] John Davis.

TSUKAMOTO: That was during the Depression?

ABE: Yeah, yeah. During the Depression.

TSUKAMOTO: Did you raise grapes at John Davis' place?

ABE: There were forty acres of grapes. Sixty acres of hay. It was a pretty big farmer.

TSUKAMOTO: Where was that, what road? Wasn't it Fruitridge [Road]?

ABE: You mean the place? At Power Inn and Fruitridge. What's now Procter and Gamble.

TSUKAMOTO: Yeah. Yeah. The corner of Power Inn and Fruitridge roads, right? What do you remember about the time you worked there.

ABE: Things were good then.

TSUKAMOTO: Good? So, you were treated well by Davis?

ABE: Yeah. He treated me well.

TSUKAMOTO: Yeah. What kind of person was John Davis?

ABE: He also came from Salt Lake [City]. There was

a shipper named W. O. Davis here. They were brothers. He got six hundred acres from the government in Florin from around that area. This John Davis--so he told me--came when he was one year old with his papa from Salt Lake. So, the government said it would give them as much farmland as they could use, all of the six hundred acres which stretched up to Florin.

TSUKAMOTO: Was John Davis a good person?

ABE: He was. Certainly, he was, but should we be saying such things?

TSUKAMOTO: Yes, that's all right. It's better to write down the truth. It's better not to distort the historical record.

ABE: Well, my day's wages was three yen fifty sen. Right after I went there--the time he came from Utah-, when he was brought by his papa and mama, he was one year old.

TSUKAMOTO: John Davis?

ABE: Yeah. John Davis was one year old. When I came, he was sixty[?]. He [the father?] used a tractor. So, he asked me if I knew how to use a tractor. I said I did, so he said let's do the summer plowing. The tractor--it was a Ford

tractor--is very jerky when it moves, and that's what I started plowing with. So then, waving his hand from behind [the tractor] like this [meaning not clear--translator], he was staring at the back of the tractor and tilting his head like so; but when I went to the other end and back one time, he said, "Better than I am," and after that he treated me well.

TSUKAMOTO: He treated you very well, then?

ABE: Yeah. I got good wages, too. Well, I came to this area in 1924, right at the height of the anti-Japanese feeling. It was terrible after that. Every week, there were anti-Japanese meetings. The old man would be dressed up in his good suit, so I would ask him where he was going, and he would say, "There's a 'Japanese' meeting today."

TSUKAMOTO: He said such a thing to you?

ABE: Yeah, he did, but he said, "It doesn't mean I don't like you."

TSUKAMOTO: He trusted you, didn't he?

ABE: Well, if he didn't go, they would have damaged done something to his property. They wouldn't have done anything to the old man himself, but

have done anything to the old man himself, but the ranch was a big one, and they could hurt his property. So, that's why, everytime when he said he was going, I would see him off. He trusted me to do everything, like irrigating the grape ranch, telling me to do like this here and like that. He had money, though. There's no need to talk about such things, but when he came, one crate was one yen.

TSUKAMOTO: One yen a crate?

ABE: And bread was one yen fifty sen. A workingman's wage was one dollar. Everybody said bread cost more.

TSUKAMOTO: That was only Japanese who made one dollar, wasn't it?

ABE: Yeah. And. . .

TSUKAMOTO: So, they made a lot of money, didn't they?

ABE: Well, they didn't make everything on the ranch. What they got for so many hundred yen, they sold--fifty yen to this person, fifty yen to that person, so this fellow W. O. Davis did shipping in Florin. The grapes he shipped by himself out of Florin. Memories, memories-- it'll be a long story if I talk about that.

TSUKAMOTO: That's all right if you're not tired.

ABE: Well, now, I wonder what's happened to John Davis. I guess he's probably dead by now.

TSUKAMOTO: There were children, weren't there?

ABE: Children. One was Russell. And John. There was one daughter named Annie Mae. Albert was the oldest. After him was Walter. The younger brother was named Walter. Then Annie Mae, the one daughter. What happened to them after that, I wonder? That was a long time ago since I've seen them. They were much older than I was back then, so I doubt they are still alive.

TSUKAMOTO: So then, afterwards, you moved to this place? When did you you move to the farm on Elder Creek [Road]?

ABE: After that I grew strawberries for a year at [] Hiroshima's.

TSUKAMOTO: Hiroshima? Oh! Hiroshima-san's place.

ABE: (Laughter) I raised grapes one year there. Didn't need to do anything else but raise grapes. I did about three acres.

TSUKAMOTO: Then you moved here to Elder Creek?

ABE: I was there only one year. The person there, the owner--I drank milk every night. I paid

for him to deliver the milk myself. . .

TSUKAMOTO: Who was that?

ABE: Russell. Russell Schultz.

TSUKAMOTO: Russell Schultz. Oh, yeah. He delivered milk?

ABE: Milk business. There, when I was living at Hiroshima's, he brought me milk every evening. Then, one day--how was it?--[he said] to me he was developing a ranch like this, and [I should] come [inaudible]. I moved after only one year there, at Hiroshima's.

TSUKAMOTO: What year was that?

ABE: Hmm. I moved in 1930. Before the war. Ten years later the war started. Ten years.

TSUKAMOTO: So, Schultz's farm at Fruitridge, no, Elder Creek--that was how many acres? Forty acres?

ABE: No. It was thirty-one acres and a half.

TSUKAMOTO: Oh. Thirty-one and half acres. You farmed there ten years! And you raised strawberries and grapes?

ABE: The whole time before the war. Then, the war started and after I came back from the internment camp, I did the same. At that point [inaudible] was getting old and I still had money to pay, so I went to pay it.

TSUKAMOTO: And Schultz looked after things, didn't he?
Your house and everything, until you returned.

ABE: So he watched it there for me. And then, after
I returned, I put it in James' name. After I
was all done paying [for it].

TSUKAMOTO: And until then it was the corporation's farm,
wasn't it?

TSUKAMOTO: The Ichigo Kumiai [Strawberry Association]--
raising the strawberries was all from my labor.
They didn't do anything. Whether it came out
okay [?] or not was all due to my labor.

TSUKAMOTO: So, did you make much money over those ten
years?

ABE: Well, I didn't lose money like others. When
they thought the strawberries were finished,
they would take out an advance against next
year's strawberry [crop]. And so, in my case,
a man named Abe-san, the bookkeeper, from
something I said, told me if I needed money, he
could give me some. But, as for making use of
that, I told him I didn't like [borrowing
money] and didn't. Others. . .

TSUKAMOTO: Gee. Nobody could manage without borrowing
[money].

ABE: Well, maybe so. There were contractors. So, it was better to manage without borrowing. You don't have to pay back anything. Well, so, I lived there for fifty-seven years.

TSUKAMOTO: Oh yeah! After you came back here, right?

ABE: Yeah. Fifty-seven years.

TSUKAMOTO: Oh, oh. After you moved there.

ABE: In between, I went to the camp. Three years and a half. The house was empty for three years and half.

TSUKAMOTO: When you were evacuated, what did you feel?

ABE: Nothing to be done about it. I thought there wasn't anything I could do. I was resigned. I wondered what would happen. But, after I went to the camp, the owner--the previous owner--said, "There's a buyer for the ranch. Why don't you sell it?" I told him that since I was in the camp, I couldn't do anything. And I told him we would talk about it after I came back from the camp. But when I returned I went right back to raising strawberries.

TSUKAMOTO: Good. There were people who sold [their property], so people who had no place to return to. . . .

ABE: Lots of people had to sell then.

TSUKAMOTO: But you didn't lose out like that since Schultz watched out for you. But, when everybody else returned, they were back to having nothing at all.

ABE: Yes, there were. In fact, when they returned home, they still had old advances [outstanding].

TSUKAMOTO: Yeah. They still had debts, didn't they?

ABE: I thought it was sad that so many people who couldn't pay back the money, were saying, "What are we going to do?" They just weren't able to pay it off. . .

[End Tape 1, Side A]

[Begin Tape 1, Side B]

[Interruption]

but I'm still alive.

TSUKAMOTO: That's because you have such a strong spirit!

ABE: And I can cook and eat breakfast and lunch by myself.

TSUKAMOTO: Yes, and you are ninety-two! Gee, lot's of people [your age] cannot walk. You have lots to be thankful for. (Laughter).

ABE: They [have] their own house, James [inaudible]. Sadako comes twice a month to make the bed and things. It's great what they do for me, but if she and James didn't come to see me. . .

TSUKAMOTO: You're lucky! Lot's of people don't get that. (Laughter).

ABE: Because they think the living should not be neglected. It's a Japanese attitude.

TSUKAMOTO: Yet, lots of young people don't do that. So, you have lots to be thankful for.

ABE: Yeah, that's right. I think it's my good fortune.

TSUKAMOTO: Yeah, I would say so. It's good, isn't it, to see your great-grandchild.

ABE: Now, if I put up with my aches and pains, then.

. . .
TSUKAMOTO: Everybody's got that problem. Grandpa, too, often used to say the leg that hurts feels heavy. He lived until he was ninety-seven. His legs felt heavy.

ABE: Then, last year, when I was thinking about getting eye glasses, I had gone to [Lake] Tahoe and a car came from the other direction--like this--and shook me up. I thought it was because my eyes were bad, so I should get some glasses. I went to an optometrist. My eyes were a little weak, so I went to see a *hakujin* [white] eye specialist. The eye doctor also said he didn't know what the problem was. I went to another one [inaudible]. He checked my eyes, and it turned out one side had gone bad. Lost the sight. Just on the right side.

TSUKAMOTO: But it's okay since you can see, isn't it?

ABE: So, now, James takes me everywhere. I cannot go anywhere if he doesn't take me. The eye doctor said it was old age (laughter). I don't want to be old, but I just get older. Ninety years--was it last year?--when I turned ninety-one, eyeglasses [inaudible].

TSUKAMOTO: You're working a lot, aren't you?

ABE: Work. . .

TSUKAMOTO: You do a lot, don't you? Among other things, you've helped out at the Buddhist Church. And you also--what was it?--helped out at kendo, too. What did you like the best of those community projects?

ABE: Well, everybody has to have religion. If you see something, and you don't have a religious mind--any religion is fine, you just have to belong to some religion. My feeling is that want to be involved, but nowadays I'm not doing anything. [Inaudible]. To tell you the truth, there isn't anything I want.

TSUKAMOTO: That's fine. But becoming so you don't want anything. . .

ABE: Everything's all done now.

TSUKAMOTO: Your future is truly blessed. You have lived a long time. You are admired by everyone. You have lots of friends.

ABE: My feeling is that no one can point their finger at me. If a person ends up with others saying they are this and that, then it's too late. My generation's finished. Can't do

anything! And. . .

TSUKAMOTO: But you have been working up to now (laughter),
and that is good, isn't it? (Laughter).

ABE: I cannot do anything now.

TSUKAMOTO: Do you watch television?

ABE: I watch television. Only, since I don't
understand English, I don't understand what
they are saying. Just, those--some game[shows]
on television.

TSUKAMOTO: They are a little easier to understand. My
mama and grandma enjoy the soap operas a lot.
Even though they don't understand English.
They get the general idea. It's interesting.
(Laughter).

ABE: Games are the most interesting. In the
morning, too, at nine o'clock, there's "Family
Feud."

TSUKAMOTO: Oh, yeah. You watch that. (Laughter).

ABE: That one I understand okay. The words they
use--since I don't understand English, so I
don't watch. What I like most is going to bed
early.

TSUKAMOTO: You don't watch Japanese movies on television?

ABE: I don't get Japanese television. . .

TSUKAMOTO: So you don't watch it?

ABE: . . . that's all.

TSUKAMOTO: Going to sleep early.

ABE: Going to bed early is the best thing.

TSUKAMOTO: (Laughter). That's good isn't it? Abe-san, we talked a long time. Today, more than one hour. Do you have anything else to say?

ABE: Nothing much. I like going to Sadako's place to eat dinner. In the morning, after my wife died, [I have] mush, oat[meal] mush--Old Fashioned Quaker Oats.

TSUKAMOTO: It's quick. I eat that, too.

ABE: I put in three tablespoons and a half.

TSUKAMOTO: That's good for you!

ABE: I think so, too.

TSUKAMOTO: My grandmother only ate that in the end because she had no teeth. (Laughter).

ABE: Me, too. [It's hard] to chew with my teeth, so it's good to eat that. Up to now, after my wife died, I cook myself and eat the same thing from the morning. Mush, a slice of of bread, one egg, and a cup of coffee. So, that takes care of the morning, but I like rice, so at night. . .

TSUKAMOTO: Yeah, that's nice, isn't it.

ABE: [Inaudible]

TSUKAMOTO: Since it's close by. That's good, isn't it?
She prepares it for you. You should live a
long time and give your blessing to your
greatgrandchildren and everybody. . .

ABE: I see my greatgrandchildren, my grandchildren,
the wife, and everybody once a week.

TSUKAMOTO: Yeah. Yeah. That's nice. That's good. Thank
you. So that ends it.

[End of Tape 1, Side B]

APPENDIX

Letter from Mrs. Russel Schulze,
Wife of Friend and Land Owner of Masatoshi Abe

It was in 1932 when Masatoshi Abe rented 3 acres from Mr. & Mrs. Russel Schulze and planted strawberries. Planted additional acreage in 1934 and 1935. Mr. Schulze offered to sell 32 acres, house, and barn for \$4,000 in 1937. After the depression years, Abe's were unable to accept the opportunity to buy the property. However, Abe's offered to buy for \$2,000 instead.

Realizing that ranches weren't selling during the post depression days, Mr. Schulze was very generous and readily agreed to sell the ranch for \$2,000.

Due to the Alien Land Law, Masatoshi Abe was unable to buy the property. It was bought through the Northern California Development Corporation, a corporation which was affiliated with N. C. Strawberry Growers Association. Small amount of mortgage payments were made annually after each crop season - until 1941. In 1942 payments couldn't be made because of mass evacuation before the peak season of the strawberry crop.

During the internment Abe could not make any mortgage payments. Mr. & Mrs. Schulze looked after the property.

In 1944 a potential buyer offered to buy the property for large amount of money from Mr. Schulze. Because no payments were made he could have foreclosed the property and made money on the deal.

Being very understanding, compassionate, and not knowing when the war will be over, Mr. Schulze wrote a letter and wanted to know whether we want to sell. Masatoshi Abe's reply was "no". His plans were going back and resume farming. Mr. & Mrs. Schulze agreed to keep the property until Abe's were able to come back.

After returning from camp, Abe's paid the property in full.

/s/ Mrs. Mabel Schulze
8542 Elk Grove Florin Rd.
Elk Grove, CA 95624